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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 000435

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: DFM ZHIGALOV SAYS KAZAKHSTAN WOULD
WELCOME POTUS VISIT, EXPRESSES CONCERNS ABOUT WTO TALKS

REF: A. ASTANA 0319

[1](#)B. ASTANA 0412

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: New Deputy Foreign Minister Konstantin Zhigalov told the Ambassador on March 11 that Kazakhstan would very much welcome a POTUS visit. He said Kazakhstan attaches great importance to hosting the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council's Security Forum in June. Zhigalov explained that the Kazakhstanis hope to finalize a NATO transit agreement for Afghanistan before the Forum, and expressed concerns about the Taliban reconciliation process. He promised Kazakhstan would be an honest broker as OSCE chairman. Zhigalov complained about the pace of Kazakhstan's WTO accession negotiations, arguing that some countries do not understand Kazakhstan's concerns. He reiterated the MFA's strong support for the ratification of the the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) agreement. END SUMMARY.

LOOKING FORWARD TO A POTUS VISIT

[1](#)2. (C) During a March 11 introductory meeting, new Deputy Foreign Minister Konstantin Zhigalov told the Ambassador that Kazakhstan very much appreciated the early phone call in November from then President-elect Obama to President Nazarbayev. "This was a very good signal," he explained, Zhigalov said Kazakhstan looks forward to hosting a POTUS visit, which would be a "great impetus" for the bilateral relationship.

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador handed Zhigalov a copy of the Secretary's response to Foreign Minister Tazhin's invitation for her to attend the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council's Security Forum, which is being hosted by Kazakhstan June 24-25. He noted that her reply confirmed that the U.S. government would participate. Zhigalov, who until February was head of Kazakhstan's mission to NATO and the EU (as well as ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg), stressed that the Security Forum is very important for Kazakhstan. The first Security Forum was held in Sweden and the second in

Macedonia, he explained, and thus this is the first time the event will be held in a CIS country. Kazakhstan is a logical host, he continued, since it is the only Central Asian country with a NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP).

CONCERNS ABOUT AFGHANISTAN

¶4. (C) Zhigalov said Kazakhstan hopes to finalize an agreement with NATO on NATO transit of supplies to Afghanistan before the Security Forum. He explained that in addition to sending several officers to ISAF headquarters, Kazakhstan is still considering deploying a medical unit to Afghanistan. Zhigalov said he had taken note of Vice President Biden's March 10 remarks on the Taliban at the North Atlantic Council. "I think Afghan President Karzai has a different view on this issue," he explained, "I suggest you meet with the new Afghan Ambassador to Kazakhstan, whose credentials I just accepted." (NOTE: Foreign Minister Tazhin has previously expressed concern that Karzai might take Taliban reconciliation too far, including inviting the Taliban's core leadership to join an Afghan coalition government. See ref A. END NOTE.)

"HONEST BROKER" AS OSCE CHAIRMAN

¶5. (C) Zhigalov noted that Tazhin hopes to visit the United States in May, though the exact dates have not yet been set. This visit, he stressed, will be important for the bilateral relationship and will be an opportunity to discuss Kazakhstan's agenda for its 2010 OSCE chairmanship, which

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will include a focus on Afghanistan. Zhigalov reassured the Ambassador about the chairmanship, saying, "To be frank, there's been much speculation because of our special relationship with Russia. But Kazakhstan will play the role of an honest broker as chairman. We learned a lot from our participation in the OSCE quintet." Zhigalov argued that Kazakhstan will bring some advantages to the table, explaining, "We know the mentality of the eastern countries better than some of our OSCE counterparts."

¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked about Kazakhstan's position on Russia's proposal to begin discussion of a new European security pact, adding that the United States is seeking more concrete information about the proposal. Zhigalov responded that Kazakhstan also needs more information. He noted Tazhin was actually about to depart for Moscow for bilateral meetings, after which he will go to Brussels for an EU Troika gathering which Zhigalov will also attend.

¶7. (C) Acknowledging Kazakhstan's special relationship with Russia, which the United States does not dispute, the Ambassador suggested Kazakhstan could perhaps play a positive role as Washington and Moscow work to redevelop their relationship. Zhigalov responded that Astana very much wants to see a better U.S.-Russia relationship because it would benefit all. However, Kazakhstan in a "go between" role would not be optimal, he said, because Astana would not relish being "the meat in the sandwich" -- i.e., would not care to be squeezed between Moscow and Washington.

CONGRESS OF RELIGIONS ALSO IMPORTANT

¶8. (C) Zhigalov said that shortly after the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council's Security Forum, Astana would be hosting the third Congress of World and Traditional Religions. (NOTE: The Congress is an initiative of President Nazarbayev that was launched in 2003. It meets on a triennial basis. END NOTE.) "This will also be a very important event for us," Zhigalov argued, "Tolerance is going to be one of our OSCE pillars. Please give this event your attention." The Ambassador said the United States applauds Kazakhstan's history of tolerance, but does have some concern about the treatment of some minority religions. Zhigalov responded

sardonically, "Sometimes the best is the enemy of the good."

COMPLAINTS ABOUT WTO ACCESSION PROCESS

¶9. (C) The Ambassador explained to Zhigalov that Prime Minister Masimov had asked for a message -- in the form of a phone call -- from a senior U.S. official reaffirming the U.S. commitment to Kazakhstan's WTO accession. SCA A/S Boucher is ready to make that call, but Masimov has apparently been too busy the past two weeks to take it. Zhigalov said he was aware of the Ambassador's discussion with Masimov and indicated the phone call is a good idea.

¶10. (C) Zhigalov then explained that in Brussels, he had been involved in Kazakhstan's WTO accession talks with the EU, and had had an "intensive dialogue" on the issue with former EC Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelsohn, with Kazakhstan awaiting a response from Mandelsohn's successor, Catherine Ashton. Zhigalov complained that those talks had "reached their limit" and said Kazakhstan's accession is now more about a "political decision" than about expert talks. "This was my cup of tea," he told the Ambassador, "and it's clear some countries don't understand our concerns. We are asking for a better understanding. Look at China and its huge labor force. It may not be a problem for Europe, but if we were to give China free access to our labor market, it would be a big problem for us." Zhigalov continued, "I'm occasionally asked about the customs union with 'some other countries'" -- meaning the proposed Russia-Belarus- Kazakhstan customs union

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-- "but the fact is that those countries know what they want, and they deliver very quickly."

SUPPORT FOR CTR AGREEMENT RATIFICATION

¶11. (C) The Ambassador noted that the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) agreement is currently under consideration in the Mazhilis -- the lower house of parliament -- and said we hope it is ratified very quickly. Zhigalov responded that the MFA cannot put direct pressure on parliament, but said the MFA is watching the process closely and strongly supports ratification. The Ambassador noted Senate Chairman Tokayev had given him his personal word on March 5 that agreement would be ratified (ref B). Zhigalov smiled, "Tokayev is not like (former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey) Gromyko. If he said yes, he meant it."

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Zhigalov is one of the very few ethnic Russians in the MFA's top leadership. The fact that he is married to an ethnic Kazakh may have given him a leg up. The 49-year-old Zhigalov, who speaks excellent English, was very well prepared for the Ambassador's meeting. He did not shy away from doing some name dropping, especially noting senior U.S. diplomats with whom he is on good terms. The Ambassador had met Zhigalov the night before at an EU dinner in honor of visiting Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel, and so has now observed Zhigalov in both a diplomatic social setting and a more formal office discussion. Zhigalov appears to be highly intelligent, cosmopolitan, and a bit sardonic -- in short, a true professional and an excellent intellectual sparring partner. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND